

STATE HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY OF IOWA  
IOWA DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS

# The Annals of Iowa

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Volume 56 | Number 1 (Winter 1997)

pps. 153-154

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## Rural Democracy: Family Farmers and Politics in Western Washington, 1890-1925

ISSN 0003-4827

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### Recommended Citation

"Rural Democracy: Family Farmers and Politics in Western Washington, 1890-1925." *The Annals of Iowa* 56 (1997), 153-154.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.11007>

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Shortridge's "population geography" will be useful to those interested in tracing the settlement of many different groups as well as to those concerned with the specific history of Kansas or certain Kansas communities. *Peopling the Plains* is a valuable addition to a growing body of literature that emphasizes the cultural richness and diversity of the Midwest.

*Rural Democracy: Family Farmers and Politics in Western Washington, 1890-1925*, by Marilyn P. Watkins. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996. xii, 239 pages. Illustrations, maps, tables, graphs, notes, index. \$42.50 cloth.

REVIEWED BY KIM NIELSEN, MACALESTER COLLEGE

In *Rural Democracy*, Marilyn Watkins traces rural political activism in Lewis County, Washington, from 1890 to 1925. Watkins effectively uses census records, tax receipts, local newspapers, and the records of local voluntary organizations, such as the Farmers' Alliance, the Populist Party, the Grange, the Socialist Party, purchasing cooperatives, and the National Nonpartisan League, to illustrate political activism among farm families. Aided by a relatively homogeneous and debt-free farming base, farming families of the region upheld a tradition of rural activism over several decades. They relied on a community-based vision of participatory democracy, with a populist sense of economic justice, independence, and rural prosperity. Using the strength of their grass-roots connections, Lewis County farmers resisted the directions of outside Farm Bureau and county agent "experts." Instead, they relied on their own organizations for expertise and market knowledge. Only in the aftermath of World War I, when class divisions between town and rural areas in Lewis County increased and influential townspeople embraced the antiradicalism of the wider political culture, did the unity of Lewis County political culture crumble.

Most historians of rural activism focus on one political movement in one historical moment. Watkins's analysis, on the other hand, asks how a series of struggles for rural justice was sustained amidst changing political and economic contexts. This adds breadth and a unique character to *Rural Democracy*. Farm families were able to continuously explore the meaning of democracy, she argues, because of the rich rural culture in which they participated. The relationships of neighbors, the shared interests of rural and town folk, and the social spaces for fun that were established within Lewis County political movements created a rural culture that enabled the repeated exploration of democracy. The vitality of the Lewis County farm activists depended

on a vital rural culture, not regional specificities, one or two charismatic individuals, or economic or political crises. Because of Watkins's unique approach, *Rural Democracy* is relevant to those interested in rural culture, agrarian politics and activism, and rural economies. And because women were vital to rural culture, *Rural Democracy* is a significant contribution to our knowledge about rural women, their activism and radicalism.

It is said that the path to someone's heart is through their stomach; and certainly food was a key to women's political involvement in the rural culture of Lewis County. The political organizations that successfully drew the farm families of western Washington relied on activities in which whole families and communities could and did participate. The complementary roles of men and women in familial politics and farming practices extended to the larger politics of farming. Discussions of producer cooperatives, voting strategies, or resistance to market values took place around tables piled with food contributed by farm women; these sites of political discussions created spaces in which women participated and then expanded their claims to activism and citizenship. Women strengthened political reform efforts and helped to sustain the unity of rural culture that those reform efforts depended on. Watkins's use of gender as an analytical tool, in combination with her focus on rural culture, is innovative and well substantiated.

*Rural Democracy* is a fine example of a community study. While Watkins provides an interesting and close examination of Lewis County, she never loses sight of her larger questions about participatory democracy, rural activism, and the rural cultures created by family farmers. Those interested in how to sustain contemporary rural activism would do well to read *Rural Democracy*.

*Ethnicity on Parade: Inventing the Norwegian American through Celebration*, by April R. Schultz. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995. xiii, 156 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$25.00 cloth.

REVIEWED BY JANE PEDERSON, UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-EAU CLAIRE

Some of us who have explored Norwegian-American historiography have acquired a strong sense that much is missing in this body of work. In her provocative study of Norwegian-American ethnicity, April R. Schultz explicates the source of some of the gaps. *Ethnicity on Parade* is an extended analysis of the cultural politics of the Norse-American Centennial of June 1925 and of Norwegian-American historiography. The centennial commemorated the 1825 arrival of the *Restauration*, which brought the first Norwegian immigrants to the United

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